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Brief sketch of the life
of C.F. Volney...
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A

BRIEF SKETCH

OF THE

LIFE OF C. F. VOLNEY,

Author of the Ruins of Empires, Lectures on History, &c.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,

THE CELEBRATED DIALOGUE

BETWEEN THE

INDUSTRIOUS AND THE PRIVILEGED CLASSES ;

ETC., ETC.

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BRIEF SKETCH

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LIFE OF VOLNEY.

CONSTANTINE FRANCIS CHASSEBŒUF, comte de VOLNEY, was born on the 3rd of February, 1757, at Craon in Anjou. His father, a distinguished advocate in this province, did not wish his son to bear the name of *Chassebœuf*, which he had himself found a source of much annoyance. It was therefore under the name of *Boisgirais*, that the young Constantine Francis studied at the College of Ancenis and Angers, and was at first known in the world; afterwards, when setting out on his oriental travels, Boisgirais changed his name to *Volney*.

At the age of seventeen, finding himself his own master, and possessed of £50 a-year which he had inherited from his mother he went to Paris in order to study the sciences. Feeling a repugnance for his father's profession of an advocate, he preferred the study of medicine and physiology. He also studied history and the ancient languages.

On inheriting a legacy of £240, he resolved to visit Egypt and Syria. Foreseeing the fatigues and dangers of such a journey, he prepared himself for it during a whole year accustoming himself to much bodily exercise and great privations. At last he set out (in 1793) for Marseilles, on foot, a knapsack on his back, a gun on his shoulder, and his £240, in gold, concealed in a belt. On arriving in Egypt he shut himself up for eight months in a Coptic monastery, in order to learn Arabic. He then travelled through Egypt and Syria. Returning to France after an absence of four years, he published his "Voyage en Egypte et en Syrie," which was immediately declared a chief d'œuvre and has constantly maintained that character. When, in 1798, an army of 40,000 Frenchmen

conquered Egypt, Volney's work was acknowledged to be the only book "that had never deceived them." In 1788, Volney wrote a treatise upon the war between the Turks and Russians. In this work he predicts the aggrandisements of Russia, and the union of the Venetian territory to Austria; and mentions, how important it would be to France to possess Egypt, but how difficult it would be to obtain such a possession.

Actuated by the desire of being useful, Volney intended to make various agricultural experiments in Corsica, imagining that he could naturalize, in that island, the sugar-cane, indigo, cotton, coffee, &c. The French government named him director of commerce and agriculture in Corsica; but, being elected a deputy of the tiers-état of the sénéchaussé of Anjou, he resigned the place which he held under government (29th Jan. 1790), professing this maxim, that a national deputy ought not to be in any way a pensioner.

At the tribune of the Constitutional Assembly, as during all subsequent governments, Volney shewed himself a decided friend of public liberty, and an enemy of all established religions, but, at the same time, a strong opponent of all popular excesses, which he condemned even with sarcasm and irony.

Before the crimes of the year 1793 were committed, he acted in opposition to the doctrines of the old government. He opposed all secret deliberations; and protested that the individuals in the gallery were not *strangers*, but their fellow citizens, their constituents, and their *brethren*. Volney was one of the first to propose the organization of the National Guards, and the division of France into communes and departments. He was named secretary on the 23rd of November, 1790. In the debates which arose upon the question whether the king should be allowed to determine upon peace or war, Volney declared himself for the negative, and afterwards proposed the following resolution, which was adopted: "The French nation renounces from this moment the undertaking any war tending to increase their territory." During the discussion on the sale of the national domains, Volney published in the *Moniteur* some reflections, in which he established the advantages of the division of landed property. His friendship with Cabanis made him well acquainted with Mirabeau, who in a discussion upon the clergy, owed to Volney his famous oratorical allusion to the window of Charles IX.

But, notwithstanding Volney in these cases acted in the sense of the majority of the assembly, he soon began to perceive that the effervescence of this majority went too far. At the end of one of the most stormy debates, he proposed that the electoral assemblies should be convoked, in order to proceed to a new nomination of deputies. This motion, at first received enthusiastically, was afterwards disposed of by voting the order of the day.

During his legislative occupations, Volney found time to write a "Chronology of the Twelve Centuries anterior to the passage of Xerxes into Greece." This treatise has been inserted, by Naigeon, in the *Dictionary of Antiquities*, belonging to the *Encyclopédia Methodique*.

In September, 1791, Volney presented to the Assembly his book entitled "The Ruins, or Meditations on the Revolutions of Empires." The first idea of this work had been conceived in the cabinet of Franklin. "The Ruins" shew that Volney was well acquainted with Dupuis "Origin of all Religions," which was as yet in manuscript.

After the close of the session, Volney returned to the Empress Catherine, who had declared war against France, the gold medal, which, in 1787, the Empress had sent him as a mark of the satisfaction she had received from reading his "Travels." "I obtained it from her esteem," said Volney to Baron Grimm, "and I now return it to her in order to preserve her esteem." Grimm replied in a letter full of sarcasms and unjust personalities.

In 1792, Volney accompanied Pozzo di Borgo to Corsica, to which island he was invited by many influential inhabitants who wished the assistance of his information. Here he made, at his own expense, some rural experiments, in a domain which he had bought, called La Confin, near Ajaccio. But the revolt of Pascal Paoli obliged Volney to leave Corsica; and his estate, which he used to call his *Little India*, was put up to auction by Paoli who had previously seemed to be his friend. While in Corsica, Volney had become acquainted with Napoleon Buonaparte, who was then only an artillery officer. Volney foresaw, even then, what the ambitious youth was capable of; and, some years afterwards, having, in America, learnt that Buonaparte had obtained the command of the army of Italy, he said, in the presence of many French refugees: "If circumstances favour him, we shall see the head of a Cæsar upon the shoulders of an Alexander."

Returning to Paris, in March 1793, Volney was referred to, by the Executive Council and by the Committee of General Defence, for information upon the political state of Corsica. Accordingly he published in the *Moniteur* (of the 20th and 21st of March,) an "Account of the state of Corsica." At the end of this account, he complains that the Corsicans disliked him, as a *heretic* because he had written "the Ruins," and as a spy because he was a Frenchman.

In 1793, Volney published a tract in 16mo entitled "Natural Law, or the Catechism of the French Citizen." The latter part of this title was afterwards altered to "Physical Principles of Morality." It is to be observed, that in this work, Volney recognizes the first character of Natural Law to be "the constant and regular order by which GOD governs the universe."

Yet Volney still remained attached to the *political* opinions which he had maintained in 1789. A sincere republican, he abhorred the crimes of those who in 1793 disgraced the name of republicanism. For having dared to oppose the vote of the 31st of May, (whereby the Girondins were ordered to be prosecuted,) Volney was imprisoned as a *royalist*! He remained in prison ten months, when he was liberated by the fall of Robespierre (9 Thermidor, Ann II., or July 28, 1794.)

A demand for literature now manifested itself, and occasioned the institution of the Normal School, intended to form schoolmasters, and to establish the best methods of teaching. Volney was appointed Professor of History; and his Lectures, which attracted an immense concourse of auditors, have become one of his best titles to literary glory. Inimical to that spirit of certitude, which, in his opinion, is the greatest obstacle to the progress of every science, he wishes that historical researches should be accompanied by the most severe and accurate scrutinies. Accordingly he offers us many new and reasonable ideas: but the conditions which he exacts for the establishment of a truth are so multiplied, that he would make us conclude, that in history, there are very few incontestible truths. At any rate, it was extraordinary to hear a Professor of History maintaining that History could scarcely be said to exist. Nevertheless his Lectures, which have been often printed, offer useful subjects for meditation: and the ideas of the professor, when divested of their absolutism, may lead to positive results.

Forced to interrupt his course of Lectures by the suppression

of the Normal School, Volney, considering that the distracted state of Europe would not allow him a safe retreat on this side the Atlantic, resolved to visit the United States of America. Accordingly he embarked at Havre, (in 1795).

The friend of Franklin could not be received with indifference by Washington, who publicly bestowed on Volney honourable marks of his confidence and friendship. But Volney felt himself very differently situated when (in 1797) John Adams was elected president. The author of the *Ruins* had severely criticised Adams' book entitled "A Defence of the Constitution of the United States" (Lond. 1787, & 1788.) Besides, "there existed at this time an epidemic animosity against the French," to use the words of Volney himself; and, while the Americans suspected that he wished to give up Louisiana to the Directory, the French diplomats reproached him with maintaining that he thought Louisiana would in no way suit France.

Among the other reasons, which tended to make Volney's stay in America disagreeable, may probably be mentioned his being attacked by Dr. Priestley. This theologian had published a pamphlet, entitled "Observations on the Progress of Infidelity with critical Remarks on the writings of some modern Unbelievers, and particularly on the *Ruins* of M. de Volney." In this treatise (a copy of which, with a note, was sent by Priestley to Volney) the Doctor calls his antagonist an atheist, an ignorant man, and scarcely superior to a Chinese or a Hottentot. The French philosopher wrote a letter in reply, in which he declined entering into a theological discussion, and answered the vulgar abuse of his opponent with a few sarcasms tempered by French urbanity. This letter, dated Philadelphia, March 2nd, 1797, was translated into English* under the inspection of the author, and was published at the above mentioned town in the same year.

Volney quitted America in the spring of 1798. Immediately on his return to France, he gave up to his mother-in-law, for whom he had always felt a perfectly filial affection, the property which he was entitled to from the death of his father, which had just occurred.

* Daru, in his "Notice sur M. le comte de Volney," p. xvi, seems to imply that Volney wrote the letter himself in English; for he says, "il répondit en Anglais, et les compatriotes de Priestley ne purent reconnaître un Français, dans cette réponse, qu'à sa finesse et à son urbanité." *Transl.*

During his absence, Volney had been chosen one of the members of the Institute.

He seconded with all his efforts the revolution of the 18th Brumaire (Nov. 9, 1799); and it may even be supposed that he was one of the persons who prepared this revolution. He was then very intimate with General Buonaparte. It was Volney, who, at the beginning of 1794, dissuaded this ambitious youth, then deprived of his rank, from going to seek service in Turkey or Russia. Buonaparte had done every thing to be reinstated, but in vain. At last, Volney invited him to breakfast, at his house, with Laréveillère-Lépeaux; and this député was so much pleased with Buonaparte's conversation, that he next day presented him to the Director Barras, by whose protection the disbanded officer recovered his rank. After the 18th Brumaire, Buonaparte, who was never ungrateful, thought of taking Volney as his colleague in the consulship; but Volney declined. He also refused to be minister of the interior, and would only consent to be named a senator. Volney did not wish to be concerned with a Cromwell. The difference of their opinions became manifest, when the first consul prepared to give back to the clergy a part of its influence. Some time afterwards, Volney in the privy council, pronounced himself strongly against the expedition to St. Domingo, of which he foresaw the disasters. He could soon perceive that his austere frankness gave displeasure, and that he was no longer received at the Tuilleries with the same cordiality as before. But he was not to be frightened; and when Buonaparte wished to be called Emperor instead of Consul, Volney had the courage to say that "it would be better to recall the Bourbons." He then sent in his resignation as a member of the senate, an action for which he obtained much renown; but afterwards, yielding to the pressing solicitations of the new sovereign, and actuated likewise by the senatus-consultum which declared that the senate would not receive the resignation of any of its members, Volney continued to sit in this assembly. He was however constantly of the party of Lanjuinais, Cabonis, Destutt de Tracy, Collaud, Garat, &c., namely of that small minority, which vainly opposed the tyrannical senatus-consulta voted with so much servility. Buonaparte affected to speak with disdain of the opposition senators, calling them *ideologists*, and mere *speculative* men.

In 1803, Volney published his “Description of the Climate and Soil of the United States of America.” In this work, as in his Oriental Travels, the author does not trouble his readers with a personal narrative. His friends have however heard him relate that he encountered many difficulties and dangers in traversing the back woods.

Volney was now living very retired in Paris, taking little part in political affairs, and appearing very rarely in the senate. He had, however, taken the title of *Count*, and of a commander of the Legion of Honour, titles, which, in the general distribution, were to a certain degree forced upon him. In a letter to one of his friends, he says, “you may observe, by my seal, that I have armorial bearings, viz., two ruined Asiatic columns, the true supporters of my nobility, surmounted by a swallow, that faithful, though migratory bird, who every year sings to me of spring and of liberty.”

In 1808, Volney published his “Supplement to Larcher’s Herodotus.” In this work he fixes the solar eclipse, predicted by Thales, at B. C. 625, and the taking of Sardis at B. C. 557; from which two dates the chronology of the kings of Media and Lydia is easily deduced. In 1809, he published the “Chronology of Herodotus,” the which dissertation was united to the one just mentioned in the second volume of the “New Researches in Ancient History” published in 1814. In these “Researches” Volney treats the writings of the Hebrews with exactly the same critical indifference as he would the writings of the Greeks or Romans.

Volney’s knowledge of Oriental languages caused him to be elected a member of the Literary Society of Calcutta, and this in the year 1798, during the heat of the war between France and England. His first linguistic work was entitled “Simplification of Oriental languages, or a new and easy Method of learning Arabic, Persian, and Turkish, with European characters” (published in 1795). The preliminary discourse to this work is considered a model of style. Here also he predicts the total subversion of the colonial system of Europe, and the formation, in South America, of states destined to rival those of this side of the Atlantic. In 1805, Volney published, “Report made to the Celtic Academy, upon the Russian work of Professor Pallas, entitled, ‘Comparative Vocabularies of the languages of the whole world.’” Fourteen years afterwards, Volney published, “The European Alphabet as applied to the languages of Asia” (Paris, 1819);

and before he died, he had corrected all the proofs of an octavo volume entitled "Hebrew Simplified." Volney's other treatises upon Glossology are, 1st, "A Vocabulary of the language of the Miamis," appended to his work on the U. S. of America; 2^{ndly}, "A Discourse on the Philosophical Study of Language," read to the French Academy, in 1819; 3^{rdly}, "Two Letters to M. le comte Lanjuinais, on the antiquity of the Phœnician Alphabet," (1819); and 4^{thly}, "New Views on the Study of Oriental Languages," first printed, in 1826, in the eighth volume of Volney's works.

Not content with having thus laboured personally, for the advancement of the study of languages, Volney left, by his will, an annual prize of £48 for the continuance of his labours. To be useful to mankind by promoting the progress of science, was the grand object of Volney's life. And his life has been well characterised, as being at the same time *nomadic* and *encyclopedic*. It may be here mentioned that in 1795, Volney wrote "Statistical Questions for the use of Travellers," a work drawn up, under the auspices of the French government, to guide the observations of their diplomatic agents.

On the 4th of June, 1814, Volney was named a peer of France by Louis XVIII; and not having been named a peer by Buonaparte during the hundred days, he continued to sit in the hereditary chamber, after the second restoration. He never appeared at the tribune, the weakness of his voice not permitting him; but in his votes, he shewed himself faithful to the principles which he had professed all his life.

His dignity of a peer gave great importance to a treatise which he published in 1819, when for a short time there existed an intention of crowning Louis XVIII. This treatise was entitled "The History of Samuel, the inventor of Royal Coronations." Volney represents Samuel as an imposter, Saul as the blind instrument of sacerdotal cunning, and David as an ambitious youth. This "History of Samuel" produced a great sensation; and it is said that the monarch, to whom Volney wished to address indirect advice, read the work with pleasure; for history will probably one day say, that notwithstanding the acts of his public life, Louis XVIII had not a very profound religious conviction.

Volney, ten years before his death, married his cousin Mlle. de Chassebœuf. This union had been projected in their youth; but Volney's wandering life having prevented it, his cousin had married another person. When she became a

widow, Volney offered her his fortune and his hand; and this union, which had been the hope of his youth, was the consolation of his latter days.

Volney was scarcely sixty-three years old when he died, on the 25th April, 1820. A disorder of the bladder which he had contracted when traversing the Arabian deserts, and the ardour with which he had constantly studied had made him an old man before his time. His character, naturally grave and serious, had assumed, especially in his latter years, a tincture of moroseness and misanthropy. Yet he preserved to the last that sensibility of soul, which appears the more precious when allied to rough and stern manners. Accustomed to spend nothing for himself, he was prodigal when succouring indigent merit, and contributing by pecuniary sacrifices, to the progress of science.

After his marriage he had given up his humble dwelling and small garden in the Rue Rochefoucauld, and had purchased a large mansion, with a very extensive garden attached to it, in the Rue Vaugirard. He expended considerable sums in the embellishment of these premises; not that the state of his health could permit him long to enjoy them, but that, as he said to his friends, it was a pleasure to him to labour for the pleasure of a helpmate destined to survive him.

Volney's funeral took place at the church of St. Sulpice; so that his remains were honoured with the ceremonies of that religion whose dogmas he had so often attacked, and whose consolations he did not demand. He was buried in the Cemetery of Père Lachaise.* Laya, director of the French Academy, pronounced over the grave a panegyric, in which the noble character of the defunct was duly appreciated. Three months afterwards, (20th August, 1820,) Volney's eulogium was pronounced before the French Academy, by his successor, M. de Pastoret. Laya's reply is distinguished by the talent and frankness with which he judges of the character and writings of the panegyrised author. The comte Daru, Volney's testamentary executor, had pronounced an eulogium of his departed friend on the 20th of June previous, in the Chamber of Peers. This discourse has been inserted in the *Moniteur* and in the *Revue Encyclopédique*, has been reprinted at the beginning of the 18mo. edition of the *Ruins*,

* The tomb is a little pyramid, not a yard high, made of coarse stone, and bearing no inscription but, "C. F. Volney." *Transl.*

and has been translated into English and Spanish. Mr. J. F. Bodin, who considers Volney as the most illustrious man of letters born in the province of Anjou, has given a long account of him in his "Recherches sur Angers et le Bas-Anjou," (ch. 39 & 40). Bodin's not having done so much justice to the character as to the writings of the deceased author, occasioned a discussion in the *Journal des Débats*, (September, 1823,) between Madame de Volney, and M. Bodin, who, to a certain degree retracted his unfavourable expressions. Finally, "A Notice on the life and writings of C. F. Volney," written by M. Adolphe Bossange, is placed at the beginning of the "Complete Works of Volney," published by Bossange, 8 vols. 8vo. Paris, 1820-1826.

We have mentioned all the works of Volney, except his "Physical state of Corsica," first published in the edition of 1816, and which is quite independent of his "Account of the Actual State of Corsica." Volney contributed occasionally to the *Revue Encyclopédique*. He also inserted many articles in the *Moniteur*, during the revolution, among others a (pretended) "Interview between Buonaparte, and certain Muphtis and Imans, in the Interior of the Great Pyramid." This imaginary "Interview," which very much mystified the Directory, has deceived more than one of Napoleon's biographers. (*Moniteur, 7 Frimare, an VII.*) In 1788 Volney published at Rennes, a paper called "The Sentinel." Many striking portraits of Volney have been engraved; the best is that by Alexander Tardieu, from the very fine bust by David.

THE following chapter is taken from Volney's "Ruins of Empires."

CHAPTER XV.

NEW AGE.

SCARCELY had the Genius uttered to himself these words than an immense noise proceeded from the West; and turn-

ing my eyes to that quarter, I perceived at the extremity of the Mediterranean, in the country of one of the European nations, a prodigious movement, similar to what exists in the bosom of a large city when, pervaded with sedition, an innumerable people, like waves, fluctuate in the streets and public places. My ear, struck with their cries, which ascended to the very heavens, distinguished at intervals these phrases :

“ What is this new prodigy ? What this cruel and mysterious scourge ? We are a numerous people and we want strength ! We have an excellent soil, and we are destitute of provision ! We are active and laborious, and we live in indigence ! We pay enormous tributes, and we are told that they are not sufficient ! We are at peace without, and our persons and property are not safe within ! What then is the secret enemy that devours us ! ”

From the midst of the concourse, some individual voices replied : “ Erect a standard of distinction, and let all those who, by useful labours, contribute to the support and maintenance of society, gather round it, and you will discover the enemy that preys on your vitals.”

The standard being erected, the nation found itself suddenly divided into two bodies of unequal magnitude and dissimilar appearance : the one innumerable and nearly integral, exhibited, in the general poverty of their dress, and in their meagre and sunburnt faces, the marks of toil and wretchedness ; the other, a petty group, a valueless faction, presented in their rich attire, embroidered with gold and silver, and in their sleek and ruddy complexions, the symptoms of leisure and abundance. Considering these men more attentively, I perceived that the large body was constituted of labourers, artizans, and tradesmen, and every profession useful to society, and that in the lesser group there were none but priests, courtiers, public accountants, commanders of troops ; in short, the civil, military, or religious agents of government.

The two bodies being front to front assembled, and having looked with astonishment at each other, I saw the feelings of indignation and resentment spring up in the one, and a sort of panic in the other : and the large said to the small body :

Why stand you apart ? Are you not of our number ?

No, replied the group ; you are the people ; we are a

privileged class ; we have laws, customs and rites peculiar to ourselves.

People. And what labour do you perform in society ?

Privileged Class. None : we are not made to labour.

People. How then have you acquired your wealth ?

Privileged Class. By taking the pains to govern you.

People. To govern us ! and is this what you call governing ? We toil, and you enjoy ; we produce, and you dissipate ; wealth flows from us, and you absorb it.—Privileged men, class distinct from the people, form a nation apart and govern yourselves. *

Then deliberating on their new situation, some among the group said : Let us join the people, and partake their burthens and cares ; for they are men like ourselves. Others replied : To mix with the herd would be degrading and vile ; they are born to serve us, who are men of a superior race. The civil governors said : the people are mild and naturally servile ; let us speak to them in the name of the King and the law ; and they will return to their duty. People the King decrees, the sovereign ordains.

People. The King cannot decree any thing which the safety of the people does not demand ; the sovereign cannot ordain but according to law.

Civil Governors. The law calls upon you for submission,

People. The law is the general will ; and *we will a new order.*

Civil Governors. You are in that case rebels.

People. A nation cannot be a rebel ; tyrants only are rebels.

Civil Governors. The King is on our side and he enjoins you to submit.

People. Kings cannot be separated from the nation in which they reign. Our king cannot be on your side ; you have only the phantom of his countenance.

* This dialogue between the people and the indolent classes, is applicable to every society ; it contains the seeds of all the political vices, and disorders that prevail, and which may thus be defined ; men who do nothing, and who devour the substance of others ; and men who arrogate to themselves particular rights and exclusive privileges of wealth and indolence. Compare the Mamlouks of Egypt, the Nobility of Europe, the Nairs of India, the Emirs of Arabia, the Patricians of Rome, the Christian clergy, the Imans, the Bramins, the Bonzes, the Lamas, &c. &c. and you will find in all the same characteristic feature,—“ Men living in idleness at the expense of those who labour.”

Then the military governors advanced, and they said ; The people are timorous ; it is proper to threaten them ; they will yield to the influence of force.—Soldiers, chastise this insolent multitude.

People. Soldiers, our blood flows in your veins ! will you strike your brothers ? If the people be destroyed who will maintain the army ?

And the soldiers, grounding their arms, said to their chiefs ; We are a part of the people ; we whom you call upon to fight against them.

Then the ecclesiastical governors said : There is but one resource left. The people are superstitious ; it is proper to overawe them with the name of God and religion.

Priests. Our dear brethren, our children, God has commissioned us to govern you.

People. Produce the patent of his commission.

Priests. You must have faith ; reason leads men into guilt.

People. And would you govern us without reason.

Priests. God is the God of peace ; religion enjoins you to obey.

People. No : justice goes before peace : obedience implies a law, and renders necessary the cognizance of it.

Priests. This world was intended for trial and suffering.

People. Do you then shew us the example of suffering.

Priests. Would you live without God or Kings ?

People. We abjure tyranny of every kind.

Priests. You must have mediators, persons who may act in your behalf.

People. Mediators with God, and mediators with the King ! Courtiers and priests, your services are too expensive ; henceforth we take our affairs into our own hands.

Then the smaller group exclaimed : It is over with us ; the multitude are enlightened. And the people replied : You shall not be hurt ; we are enlightened, and we will commit no violence. We desire nothing but our rights : resentment we cannot but feel, but we consent to pass it by : we were slaves, we might now command ; but we ask only to be free, and free we are.

THE PROPER STUDY OF HISTORY.

THE wisest conduct with regard to youth, is not to direct their attention to the study of history, until they are capable of judging, in some degree, for themselves. They would then be more able to derive advantage from it, and their minds would not bend before the prejudices which an ordinary education inspires. Were I to trace a plan for studies of this kind, after requiring these conditions, the following appears to me the mode best calculated for carrying it into execution.

In the first place, I would require that my pupils should possess a preliminary knowledge of the demonstrative sciences, such as mathematics, natural philosophy, astronomy, &c., that is to say, that they might have their minds stored with the means and the terms of comparisons, to enable them to judge of the facts they find stated in history. I have mentioned astronomy, because without some idea of that science, we can know but little of geography, and if destitute of geographical knowledge, we know not where to place the scenes of history, which float in the mind like clouds in the air. I do not consider it necessary that my pupils should study the details of these sciences deeply; I would not even expect them to be entirely free from moral and religious prejudices. It will be sufficient if they are not too strongly prepossessed in their opinions, and that their minds are open to conviction. With this disposition I have no doubt that the varied spectacle of historical contradictions will rectify their ideas by extending them. *He who has limited his acquaintance to the narrow circle of his own relations or party is obstinate; he who knows no creed but that of his own church, is intolerant; for obstinacy and intolerance are always the fruits of a selfish ignorance: but when we mix with the world, when we have compared a number of opinions, we perceive that every man has his value, and every opinion its reasons.* Thus we are taught to smooth the sharp angles of vanity, that we may roll gently along with the torrent of society. This fruit of experience, which may be so well gathered in travels, history also affords; for history is an agreeable journey, in which, without dangers or fatigue, we may travel through the universe of time and place.

Volney's Lectures on History.





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